The College-Educated Trump Voter: A Look at the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Who voted for President Trump? Why did his supporters vote for him? After the 2016 Presidential Election, these questions were of pressing concern as people tried to make sense of President Trump's unexpected victory. Since polls nationwide predicted that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would come out on top (Bomey, 2016), pundits and scholars alike spent much of their post-election analysis focusing on Trump supporters. I did the same for my senior thesis, choosing to conduct interviews with Trump supporters at Boston College.

Post-primary and post-election analyses in the mainstream press largely focused on President Trump's working-class white support: the "blue collar," "rural" Middle Americans to whom President Trump was purportedly more appealing than the more politically established candidates on both sides of the aisle (Confessore, 2016; Coontz, 2016; Evich, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Swaine, 2016; Weisberg, 2016). Many academics took a similar approach, paying special attention to President Trump's working-class white support in their explanations for the outcome of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Turney et al., 2017; Gidron & Hall, 2017).

But what does the "white working class" entail? Many of the aforementioned analyses use education as a "proxy for class" (Turney et al., 2017, p. 2): simply put, if one does not have a college degree, then one is deemed a member of the working class. In reality, though, class is far more complicated than whether or not one has a college degree. This is especially true when looking at non-college educated whites,

a group of people who—despite their lack of a college degree—still benefit from the racial wealth gap that plagues American society to this day (Darity et al., 2018).

Some members of the press (Carnes & Lupu, 2017; Silver, 2016) and social science scholars (Walley, 2017; Manza & Crowley, 2017; Bhambra, 2017) have been wary of the working-class narrative surrounding President Trump's rise to the presidency. This perspective is important, as one could make a solid argument that President Trump is more of an advocate for the elite than the working class. My research challenges narratives of Trump's working class support by showing how he appeals to non-working class individuals at an elite academic institution like Boston College.

In order to understand why my interviewees support President Trump, I sought to uncover the narrative frames and discourses that they used in their support for President Trump. This approach draws heavily from the work of Hochschild (2016), who used qualitative sociological research methods in an attempt to understand the perspectives of Tea Partiers in Louisiana. Though Hochschild's subjects were similar to mine in terms of conservative political perspectives, the differences in our populations—Hochschild's being Tea Partiers facing institutional decay in the South; mine being largely upper and upper-middle class Trump supporters at a wealthy New England university—engendered different articulations of why they identify as conservatives. While Hochschild's subjects largely rejected narratives of victimization, I found that my interviewees were willing to frame themselves as victims. In addition, the phenomenon of voting against one's own interests is far more applicable to Hochschild's population than

my interviewee pool: while Hochschild outlines how Tea Partiers in Louisiana continue to support conservative politicians despite the institutional decay that has resulted from a lack of government spending in the area, my interviewees' support for Trump is much more clearly aligned with their own interests—especially with regards to taxes and retention of personal wealth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election has been a subject of much discussion in the social sciences. In analyzing President Trump's electoral victory, scholars have looked into both economic and cultural drivers of Trump support. Evidence indicates that the influence of "cultural backlash" (Turney et al., 2017, p. 1) outweighed that of "economic displacement" (Turney et al., 2017, p. 1) (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Schaffner et al., 2018; Turney et al., 2017), or that, at the very least, economic and cultural factors interacted in similarly influential ways (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Due to the privileged economic standing of my interviewee pool, the influence of economic displacement was minimal amongst my interviewees; this paper builds on findings that indicate the importance of cultural backlash in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election.

Beyond why college-educated individuals support President Trump, this paper is also concerned with perceptions of who voted for President Trump. Walley (2017) writes about the phenomenon of the "white working class" that has dominated much of the post-election analysis. Though class is a complex and multi-faceted concept, post-election analyses have measured class on the simple basis of education level. This understanding of class is quite misleading, as it lumps together Wall Street millionaires with elementary school teachers in the non-working class and small-business owners with service workers in the working class (Walley, 2017, p. 232). More problems arise in this conflation of education with class when one considers the impact of race. Data compiled from the Center for American Progress (CAP) estimates that whites make up over 70% of the voting population (Griffin et

al., 2017, p. 6). Moreover, whites are the only race for which the majority voted for President Trump (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 18). Thus, it is not inaccurate to say that President Trump's voter base is distinctly white.

The whiteness of the typical Trump voter is paramount when discussing their class position. In a country where the median white household without a high school diploma has more wealth than the median black household with a college degree (Darity et al., 2018, p. 6), it is inaccurate to assume that non-college educated whites are all economically-strapped, working-class individuals. This is especially true when looking at the non-college educated whites that voted for Trump. In their article for the *Washington Post* titled "It's time to bust the myth: Most Trump voters were not working class," Duke professor Nicholas Carnes and Vanderbilt professor Noam Lupu find that nearly 60 percent of non-college educated white Trump voters were in the top half of the income distribution (i.e., making more than $50,000). Moreover, they found that one in five non-college educated white Trump voters had a household income of over $100,000. The fact of the matter is that Trump supporters, in general, were fairly affluent: one-third had household incomes at or below $50,000, one-third had household incomes between $50,000 and $100,000, and one-third had household incomes of $100,000 or more (Carnes & Lupu, 2017).

In addition, I would hesitate to associate Trump supporters with low levels of education. Though CAP data on the 2016 election results shows that non-college educated white voters swung to Trump in key states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Griffin et al., 2017), such findings should not be used as an excuse to ignore the large number of college-educated whites who still

supported Trump. According to CAP data comparing 2012 and 2016 election results, white college-educated support for the Republican presidential candidate fell from 48.7 percent in 2012 to 43.0 percent in 2016, while support for the Democratic presidential candidate only increased from 49.4 percent to 50.1 percent. This means that—in an election where a third-party vote was essentially a vote for Trump, as former President Obama said himself (Parkinson, 2016)—white college-educated support for third-party candidates rose from two percent in 2012 to seven percent in 2016 (Griffin et al., 2017, p. 18). The more than 40 percent support for Trump amongst college-educated whites is a significant proportion by itself. Add on the fact that so many college-educated whites voted for third-party candidates, and one could argue that college-educated whites are less opposed to President Trump than advertised.

Manza & Crowley (2017) estimate that the median Trump voter makes $17,000 more than the median American, and that the average Trump voter has more years of education than their state's average resident. Their paper reminds us that President Trump—despite the framing of him as a champion of the working-class—embodies a form of populism that is "distinctly non-redistributive": he supports tax cuts for wealthy households, business-friendly deregulation, and corporate tax cuts (Manza & Crowley, 2017, p. 9). Bhambra (2017) aptly describes Trump supporters not as unique victims of systemic economic changes, but as a group of people suffering a "relative loss of privilege" (p. S226). This is not to say that President Trump is devoid of any working-class support; rather, it is a call for a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be working-class in the

United States. Such an understanding may lead one to reconsider the influence of class anxiety in the rise of President Trump.

In terms of answering the question of who voted for President Trump, my thesis builds upon the work of critical race theorists and whiteness studies scholars who highlight how whites of all economic classes have historically worked together in upholding the white supremacist social order. Lipsitz's (1995) term "possessive investment in whiteness" accurately describes how white Americans often choose to invest in themselves rather than the common good. Post-World War II trade unions are an example of this phenomenon, as they focused on unionizing white mass-production agencies rather than pushing for goals such as full employment and universal healthcare that would have benefitted people of all races. In general, Lipsitz (1995) outlines how predominantly white "political coalitions," both on the left and on the right, propose seemingly race-neutral policies (from the New Deal to 1980s federal tax laws) that, in effect, only serve to benefit fellow white people. From this perspective, it is clear how the interests of a working-class white individual in the Midwest would align with the interests of a college-educated white individual in the Northeast.

Another interesting way to frame how whiteness operates is Alexander's (2010) idea of "racial bribes." From Bacon's Rebellion in the late 17th-century (when the planter class gave special privileges to poor whites over Native Americans in order to prevent a cross-racial class rebellion), to Clinton's Crime Bill nearly three hundred years later (when the Democrats adopted conservative tough-on-crime policies to appeal to white swing voters), white elites have a history of doling out

"racial bribes" to lower class whites at the expense of nonwhites. When considering the working-class whites who support President Trump, I think it is useful to understand Trump's presidential campaign as part of this long history of "racial bribes" in America.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand this whiteness perspective is through the lens of W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois argues that racism is a global force that benefits whites of all class positions in its disproportionate distribution of economic resources according to the color line (Du Bois, 1915). This perspective urges us to reconsider the separation of "economic displacement" and "cultural backlash" in explanations of President Trump's white working-class support; Du Bois' work outlines how the culture of racism is inherently tied to the economic subjugation of people of color around the world (Du Bois, 2007). Du Bois' point of view highlights the extent to which white working-class conceptions of fair treatment depend on the exploitation of people of color—a perspective echoed by Bhambra (2017) with her description of the white working-class as a group suffering a loss of "relative privilege" in the increasingly globalized economy.

This theoretical perspective—in conjunction with President Trump's track record in office as a champion of the rich rather than the working class (Manza & Crowley, 2017)—challenges the notion that President Trump is the populist, working-class politician that his campaign rhetoric touted him as being. It complicates conventional understandings of who voted for President Trump: conversations on the economic struggles of white working-class voters are insufficient without accounting for the material and psychological benefits they reap

due to their white identity. Once one considers the perspective that President Trump is a politician who ultimately serves the needs of the privileged, then it becomes clear how an investigation into non-working class Boston College Trump supporters—who are part of a student body with more students in the top one-percent of family income than the bottom sixty percent (Aisch et al., 2017)—may help us understand why President Trump got elected.

In trying to understand the narrative frames and discourses of my interviewees, I found literature on rational choice theory to be most useful. Abell (2000) provides a comprehensive overview of rational choice theory, presenting it as a theoretical perspective that allows us to see people as individual actors behaving in ways that most fully align with their self-interests. In analyzing Trump supporters, this rational choice theoretical perspective is certainly applicable to privileged populations like my interviewee pool—there is tremendous perceived incentive for those in good economic standing to vote Republican, as policies of low taxes and deregulation are seemingly beneficial for those with access to wealth. For my interviewees—especially those who self-identified as upper-class—supporting President Trump is seen as the rational economic choice to make.

Beyond rational choice theory as an over-arching theoretical framework, other scholarly perspectives were applicable to certain themes and trends that arose out of my interviews. My interviewees' disdain for income taxes is consistent with Morgan & Prasad's (2009) analysis, which argues that income taxes are met with particular scorn due to their visibility (as opposed to the relative invisibility of consumption taxes). Bail et al. (2018) provide a recent analysis of present-day

conservatives, arguing that exposure to liberal political perspectives leads to an increase in conservative attitudes amongst conservatives. This could explain my interviewees' steadfast conservatism in the face of opposing liberal influences on campus. Lastly, for the women whom I interviewed for this study, Schreiber (2008) provides a relevant perspective on the importance of conservative women's organizations in building networks of conservative women. Her work sheds light on the successes and failures that my woman-identifying interviewees have had in building networks of like-minded women on campus.

Overall, this project draws from perspectives of critical race theorists and whiteness studies scholars in answering the question of who voted for President Trump. Such perspectives challenge white working-class tropes and legitimize the study of non-working class Trump supporters in efforts to understand why President Trump was elected. In terms of uncovering narrative frames and discourses from my interviews, rational choice theory and other scholarly perspectives are useful towards understanding the points of view of my interviewees.

METHODS

Through my conversations with Trump supporters at Boston College, interviewees varied in the kinds of issues they talked about and the degree to which they were passionate or knowledgeable about their own positions. Despite these variations, the interviewees were united in the fact that they all self-identified as Trump supporters and none self-identified as working-class. My goal with the interviews was to delve deep into the various individual perspectives of my interviewees, and to emerge from that deep dive with certain narrative frames and discourses that were common amongst the interviewees.

Organizing such a large amount of data—I conducted over sixteen and a half hours of interviews, in total—into a finite amount of narrative frames is a challenging task, but necessary towards understanding if there is any larger story that can be told from the data. Arlie Hochschild's 2016 book, "Strangers in Their Own Land," serves as a methodological guide on how to compare and synthesize these kinds of interviews.

Hochschild (2016) immersed herself in communities of Tea Party supporters and activists in Louisiana, looking for what she calls the "deep story" of what is happening on the right. She wanted to go deeper than surface level analyses of Tea Partiers as low-tax, anti-government libertarians. In doing so, she argues that she uncovered a "deep story" of a group of people that feels "left behind." This "deep story" can be explained by the common narratives that Hochschild gathered from her interviews: the idea that people—largely people of color—are "Line Cutters," circumventing the white working-class that has been "Waiting in Line" for

generations; the feeling of "Betrayal" that interviewees felt towards the bureaucrats who allowed for such line cutting; the "Intermission" of the American dream due to automation, offshoring, and the power of multinational corporations; generally, the race, gender, and class considerations of a predominantly white, male, non-upper class group who feels they have been cheated on the basis of their identity.

This project employs narrative frames in a similar fashion. Through my interviews, I found that interviewees repeatedly shared certain positions or narratives on topics related to hard work, identity, and community. Taking note of these narratives is key, as they show that there is—to an extent—a common experience of being a Trump supporter at Boston College. More broadly, the existence of these common narratives serves to justify the sociological study of non-working class Trump supporters as a group, much in the same way that Hochschild's (2016) book serves to justify the study of white working-class Trump supporters as a group.

I recruited my interviewees by reaching out to the president of the leading conservative student organization on campus, College Republicans, via email. My invitation to participate was then forwarded to all members of the club. All sixteen of my interviewees were reached through that College Republicans email. As a result, it is very possible that my sample does not encapsulate the entire Trump-supporting population at Boston College.

Interviews were semi-structured and conducted one-on-one, either in reserved classrooms or reserved study rooms inside O'Neill Library on campus. All interviewees read and signed informed consent documents, which included consent

for me to record the interviews on my phone. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and coded in order to find certain themes and trends in the interview data. All interviewees were compensated with a $30 Amazon gift card through self-funding.

Below is a table outlining the identity markers for my interviewees:

	Race	Gender	Sex. Orient.	BC Class	Major	Social Class	Hometown
Int. 1	White	Man	Hetero.	Freshman	PoliSci	Upper-Middle	South Boston (urban)
Int. 2	White	Man	Hetero.	Sophomore	Finance & Physics	Upper	Grafton, MA (suburb)
Int. 3	White & Asian	Man	Hetero.	Sophomore	Econ	Middle	New Jersey (urban)
Int. 4	White	Man	Hetero.	Freshman	Econ	Upper	Atlanta (suburb)
Int. 5	White	Man	Hetero.	Sophomore	PoliSci	Lower-Middle	Mendon, MA (suburb)
Int. 6	White Hispanic (Spanish)	Woman	Hetero.	Sophomore	CompSci	Upper	Switzerland
Int. 7	White	Man	Hetero.	Freshman	Finance	Upper-Middle	Atlanta (suburb)
Int. 8	White	Woman	Hetero.	Freshman	Nursing	Upper	MA suburb (unspecified)
Int. 9	Asian (Chinese)	Man	Hetero.	Freshman	Econ & Math	Middle	MA suburb (unspecified)
Int. 10	White Hispanic (Cuban)	Man	Hetero.	Sophomore	PoliSci	Middle	Hialeah, FL (suburb)
Int. 11	Hispanic (Cuban)	Woman	Hetero.	Sophomore	English	Middle	Rockland County, NY (suburb)
Int. 12	White	Woman	Hetero.	Freshman	Neuroscience & Linguistics	Upper-Middle	Research Triangle Park, NC (suburb)
Int. 13	White	Woman	Hetero.	Freshman	Psychology	Upper	East Bay, CA (suburb)
Int. 14	Asian-American (Filipino)	Man	Hetero.	Sophomore	History + PoliSci	Upper-Middle	Northern New Jersey (suburb)
Int. 15	White	Woman	Hetero.	Sophomore	History + PoliSci	Upper-Middle	Southwest Florida (suburb)
Int. 16	White	Man	Hetero.	Freshman	Secondary Education + History	Upper-Middle	Western MA (suburb)

1. *"What's good for me is what's good for all"*

To an extent, we all have biases that stem from our own personal experiences. My interviewees were no different. When speaking on the economy, as a whole, the interviewees would naturally draw from their own experiences. Given the relatively young age of the sample, these personal experiences with the economy were more often than not through their parents. Whether they were business executives or real estate developers, the parents of my interviewees would offer their views on taxes, welfare, and other economic issues. Interviewees were quick to jump from the personal to the collective—they would see how their own families fared under certain economic policies and draw conclusions on the economy as a whole from their own perspective.

Obviously, all economic policies do not affect all families in the same way. Take Interviewee #12, for example. A white woman who self-identifies as upper-middle class, Interviewee #12 grew up in the business and technology hub of Research Triangle Park, North Carolina (RTP). A suburb of Raleigh, RTP is an area that is economically thriving—"very much business and technology area… fast growing suburbs kind of thing" (Interviewee #12).

Interviewee #12's family is fortunate enough to be a part of this economic growth in the area. She describes her father as "an international businessman for IBM… very much business-y… white collar." Simply put, when Interviewee #12 sees news profiles on working-class, blue-collar Trump supporters, she does not see herself or her family in those stories:

Yeah, not at all. It seems very foreign almost. Like, I don't know any steelworkers or anyone, like, from the Midwest… It doesn't seem to represent any of the Trump supporters I knew.

So, who were the Trump supporters that Interviewee #12 knew growing up, if she was not living in a deindustrialized, blue-collar, Midwest town? Her upbringing in an area of economically successful professionals is far different from what one may expect of a Trump supporter if one is under the assumption that Trump is a working-class hero.

At the beginning of our conversation, I was unsure how exactly Interviewee #12 found herself to be a Trump supporter: she described her area as "a very blue area of North Carolina"; her friends around the time of the 2016 Election were "very, very liberal and open about it"; in her words, "everyone likes Hillary and no one likes Trump is kind of the idea around me." When I asked her about her family, though, it became clear how Interviewee #12 could become a conservative in an area that is apparently so liberal.

Except for her older sister, Interviewee #12's family of six is "all pretty conservative." Growing up, Interviewee #12 claims that she would not talk much about politics with friends or at high school—rather, most of her political discourse took place at the dinner table. She vividly recalled certain dinner table debates between her older sister and her father that ultimately solidified her conservative viewpoint. After seeing her father and her sister debate on topics like gun control,

unions and the gender wage gap, "[my father's] perspective in the business world seemed to make more sense to me."

I was intrigued to learn more about Interviewee #12's family situation. I learned that the main difference between her non-conservative older sister and the rest of the conservative family was the path of schooling each child underwent: while her older sister went to public middle school and a college preparatory high school, Interviewee #12 and the rest of the family went to Catholic middle school before going onto public high school. Interviewee #12 described her Catholic middle school as a homogenous, conservative environment:

> *It was a Catholic middle school, so everyone's parents were pretty much all, like, conservative Republicans. So the kids didn't really seem to hear other ideas and then wanna learn and conflict those ideas… It was, like, kind of almost an echo chamber in a way.*

Unlike her non-conservative sister, Interviewee #12 rarely clashed with her father. As such, she viewed her father as a trusted source on everything politics—a successful businessman with the kind of life experience and perspective that should be respected. So, when the government would put forth certain economic policies, Interviewee #12 would look to her father when deciding whether or not the policy should be supported:

I have seen how the tax cuts helped my family get a bonus. I know they've helped, like, several others. From the way my dad explained it to me, the tax cuts allow them to, like, you know, give back to the employees a little bit and further increase the business by having more incentives for employees to work harder.

As a businessman, Interviewee #12's father's relationship with taxes is far different than, say, a service worker's relationship with taxes. For Interviewee #12's father, ramifications of tax policy are immediately considered from an employer's perspective: lower taxes means more money in the employer's pocket, giving the employer more freedom to distribute to his employees without government intervention. It is easy to see how low taxes would be enticing for an employer. Not only is less money being taken by the government—the newfound money that would have previously been taxed can now be distributed to employees on an incentive basis and presumably increase productivity for the entire business.

If one is only told this perspective on taxes, how can we expect one to support anything but the lowest tax plan possible? This is the position from which Interviewee #12 operates. Sure, she could have had plenty of non-conservative friends in high school, but when most of her meaningful political conversation occurs at the dinner table with conservative family members and her Catholic middle school was a self-described conservative "echo chamber," it is understandable why Interviewee #12 would support conservative politics without much thought to perspectives different from hers.

Interviewee #12 was not the only interviewee with a conservative, economically successful (or at least economically secure) father. I was very much interested in this parental influence—how parents, especially fathers, helped shape the interviewees understanding of what is good for them, and how that understanding affected their view on what is good for us all.

Like Interviewee #12, Interviewee #8 was a white woman with a conservative father. Growing up in the Massachusetts suburbs, Interviewee #8 self-identifies as upper-class—she mentioned how she went to private school all of her life and has funds set aside for her by her grandfather. Given her openness and honesty about her class position, it was refreshing to talk to Interviewee #8. She was willing to share a lot about her experience as an upper-class Trump supporter and serves as a great example of how Trump's appeal to the upper-class can be just as strong as his appeal to the working-class.

When talking to Interviewee #8 about her support for Trump, opposing forces of family and school were immediately brought to the forefront (as they were for Interviewee #12). From pre-K through eighth grade, Interviewee #8 had attended an elite, high-tuition (north of $30,000) private all-girls school just southwest of Boston. From there, she attended an elite, college preparatory high school south of Boston with a much different culture:

> S*o that was kind of hard for me going from like all girls school where most people are like Christian and like pretty conservative and then going to [high school] where you have kids from all around the world.*

For Interviewee #8, her experience at a more liberal high school did not shift her politics to the left. In fact, the proudly left-wing environment—for example, Interviewee #8 claims that students were passing out pro-Hillary stickers at recess with slogans from her campaign—left Interviewee #8 "hoping for Trump to win."

Despite her qualms with life at her high school, Interviewee #8 did find solace in her home life. She describes her home growing up as a "really Catholic household": they went to Church every Sunday; she was raised reading the Bible and going to youth group; her community at Church was central to her upbringing. As was the case with many other interviewees, this heavily religious background informed Interviewee #8's conservatism. In her case, the connection between Catholicism and conservative politics was found in the issue of abortion. She mentioned how she is passionately pro-life because her father, who was adopted:

> *My dad like told me a lot about Roe v. Wade when I was younger. But I didn't really listen and then I looked it up in high school and learned that my dad was born in '62 and Roe v Wade was in '73. So my dad always tells me, like, "I don't know if I would be here if I'd been born ten years later." So, things like that and just the way I was like raised in like reading the Bible… I think that's like how I got my pro-life stance.*

The influence from her father in determining what is or is not good for society went beyond the issue of abortion. Both her father and her grandfather work

in real estate development. As such, Interviewee #8's views on a variety of issues come down to whether or not the policy is good for business. This perspective differed from her more left-wing peers in high school. She mentioned how her classmates were outspoken in their opposition to conservatism and how protests were common on her high school campus—and they were not protesting for tax cuts and deregulation:

> *So like I was friends with a lot of people who had socialist ideas or like they read a lot of like Karl Marx or sort of more progressive ideals about finance and things like that. And I was thinking about sort of in relation to like my grandfather and my dad who were both like in real estate development. I would talk to them a lot about what they thought about it and they would say that they were always pro low corporate tax rates that would help their company prosper so they could hire more people.*

Just like Interviewee #12, Interviewee #8's father looks at taxes from the perspective of the employer: lower taxes gives the employer more freedom to do with their money as they please. Working from this perspective assumes that all tax policy should be geared towards what is best for the employer, not the employee. Growing up with parents who are employers (or, at least, highly-paid employees) can certainly affect one's view on what is best for tax policy.

This business-friendly perspective not only influences one's view on taxes, but other issues as well. For Interviewee #8, convenience for businesses and business owners was top priority, even in the case of the environment:

> *[My father] has a lot of like stories from his own experience working in real estate development that he shares with me. One that I can remember off the top of my head is like he was building something around this area and there was a letter that he got from an environmentalist foundation, something like that, and he couldn't build on the land because there was like a specific species of rabbit or like some like crazy thing. And he like was really mad about it so he told me. And I remember when he told me when I was like ten and I didn't really think about it. And then like when I was like 16 in high school, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I remember my dad was like really mad one time because he like couldn't build on this land because there was like a rabbit or maybe it was a turtle or something like crazy."*

In this scenario, Interviewee #8 was only ten years old, so she was almost certainly not equipped with the knowledge or articulation skills to refute her father in this situation. We should not expect ten year olds to have the ability to defend necessary environmental regulations to businessmen who are looking to turn the highest profit. From Interviewee #8's ten year old perspective, she was most likely viewing her dad's word as the absolute truth, as most ten year olds do.

Unfortunately, this kind of fatherly advice has a distinct political undertone, and this undertone undoubtedly has an influence on the children that are being raised.

These kinds of subtle forms of influence from parents on what is or is not good for society were quite common in my interviews. Due to their subtlety, many interviewees were uncomfortable in saying that they were completely influenced by their parents. Sure, they conceded slightly that their parents were an influencing factor, but interviewees constantly reiterated that their views were their own. Interviewee #8 was no different:

> *And even though I did get a little influence from like my dad, because he's really conservative, I always sort of had my own like skepticism about it. But then going through high school, everything was sort of reaffirmed what my dad had been telling me just from like my own experience there, I would say. Pretty much… I would agree with most of what he like thinks about issues.*

Like Interviewee #12 and Interviewee #8, Interviewee #2 grew up in a conservative household. Hailing from Grafton (a central Massachusetts suburb), Interviewee #2 has many conservative influences in his family life: his father works in banking as a senior manager and is a big proponent of free, unregulated markets; his mother is a "super hard right conservative" with a big personality and strong views; many of Interviewee #2's cousins and family members were in the military and hold strong views on national security. Like my other interviewees, Interviewee #2 did not perceive the similarities between him and his parents' political

perspectives as a result of deliberate influence. Beyond his parents' detesting of Barack Obama's proposed economic regulations in the 2008, Interviewee #2 feels that they "didn't really force things" on him.

Regardless of perceived parental influence, similarities between Interviewee #2's perspective and the perspectives of his parents (especially his father) are hard to ignore. When I asked Interviewee #2 to talk about the issues that are most important to him, he immediately brought up his father:

> *Yeah probably the economy, I guess that's where my upbringing's from, like my dad. My top priority is economic growth—retaining your wealth as a person. Second to that, I guess it was like a lot of things that can pertain to that, because once you bring up wealth then you can say like "Oh, how do taxes affect your wealth?" Then it's, like, "What affects taxes?" You can say, like, "All these social programs will affect your taxes, because the government has to pay for them." So it pretty much brings in literally everything. I guess the overarching issue is the economy and keeping personal wealth for me, specifically.*

Out of all of my interviewees, Interviewee #2 was perhaps most explicit in his belief that what is good for him is good for all. As he says above, his measurement for what makes sound tax policy is not complex: for Interviewee #2, efficacy of tax policy is determined by the extent to which that policy detracts from his personal wealth, not the value of the social programs that the taxes fund. When it comes to measuring economic growth, Interviewee #2's insistence on retaining personal wealth does not waver:

Honestly, I don't really care about any specific economic structure. I just pretty much care about—I guess, like, the American economy as a whole. Whatever pretty much drives company's earnings, in my opinion, will help me, because that ties into keeping personal wealth. As long as the overall stock market—which is not the economy, it's like a different thing—but, as long as that keeps going up, I'm happy as a person. That's just my opinion.

For Interviewee #2, personal wealth retention is of upmost importance, even when his personal wealth interests go against the mission—or, at least, the rhetoric—of the Trump administration. When I asked Interviewee #2 about his thoughts on an "America-first" economy (one of the foundational messages of the Trump campaign), his support—in his own words—was "wishy-washy":

I want jobs to be here as opposed to overseas. But at the same time, it's just: will them bringing the jobs back here make my personal wealth decrease? It's kind of selfish, but at the same time, you just gotta balance it between yourself and others.

A sophomore finance student, Interviewee #2, in many ways, is an embodiment of the central tenets of classical economic theory. He is an unabashed supporter of wealth accumulation—of acting in his own self-interest. His views on all aspects of the economy—from growth to taxes to the job market—are all

measured in terms of how they will affect his personal accumulation of wealth. In classical economic terms, one can argue that Interviewee #2 is acting exactly how he should be: his pursuit of rational self-interest is the kind of behavior required of people in a capitalist economy. People like Interviewee #2 put Adam Smith's "invisible hand" in motion.

In talking about taxes, Interviewee #2 and other interviewees simply elided debates on how taxes can contribute to the greater good. To my interviewees, distrust in government was often too high to even consider the social benefits of taxation. This disdain for taxes echoes what Morgan & Prasad (2009) found in their comparative analysis of tax systems in the United States and France. They found that the kind of direct taxation in the United States (such as income tax) is treated with far more animosity than the kind of indirect taxation has been instituted in France since World War I (such as consumption tax). The main difference between direct and indirect taxes is visibility: while the former is quite visible and explicit in the eyes of taxpayers, the latter is not. Perhaps my interviewees would not be so vehemently against taxation if the United States instituted a France-like system of indirect taxation.

When trying to understand the role of self-interest amongst Trump supporters, it is necessary to understand self-interest not as a concrete fact, but as a learned perspective. Nearly all of my interviewees grew up with parents, in households, or in communities that supported conservative political thought; more so, many of my interviewees grew up in these conservative environments while enjoying a relative amount of economic privilege. Thus, it should not be surprising

that my interviewees have come to understand self-interest in terms of deregulation, low taxes, and personal wealth accumulation, and that my interviewees associate pursuit of that self-interest with pursuit of the collective interest. This pursuit of self-interest is at the heart of the "what's good for me is what's good for all" mentality. Though Interviewee #2 may have been most explicit, self-interest—whether deliberately or not—ultimately determined the economic perspectives of Interviewee #12, Interviewee #8, and many of the other Trump supporters I interviewed for this study.

2. *"I overcame the struggle, and so can you"*

Meritocratic principles are at the heart of American conservative ideology. The conservative ideal states that it is up to the individual to work hard and achieve success, and it is often justified by arguing that everyone has an opportunity to succeed. This importance of hard work was reiterated constantly by my interviewees—its purpose is twofold: both to justify the personal privilege and success of the interviewees (especially those who identified as upper or upper-middle class), as well as to justify the struggles that other Americans are going through. In response to the plight of impoverished communities and undocumented immigrants, the sentiment I gained from my interviewees was clear: I overcame the struggle, and so can you. From stories of their own family's immigration to America to stories of the hard work put in by interviewees and their parents, interviewees often cited their own personal struggles (which they overcame through hard work) as justification for the struggles of others (which others can overcome if they work hard enough).

Many of my interviewees had a great deal of pride for the places they came from and the families that raised them. Interviewee #10 was certainly no different. A sophomore studying political science, Interviewee #10 was able to clearly articulate the connections between his political perspective and personal background. Growing up in Hialeah, Florida—"a suburb next to Miami," in his words—Interviewee #10 was raised in a community of Cuban immigrants just like his family (he says that his hometown is "like 90-something percent" Cuban immigrants).

Hialeah is a great example of the kind of community to which Trump was trying to appeal with his "America first" campaign rhetoric. Interviewee #10 described Hialeah as a divided area: west of Palm Avenue, one can find new stores, shopping centers, and restaurants; in the east, empty warehouses (former factories) are scattered throughout, many of which are now being used for storage. These empty warehouses are places where Interviewee #10's grandparents used to work; they were the first jobs they had upon immigrating to America from Cuba. To Interviewee #10, the empty warehouses symbolize the kind of economic opportunity once afforded to Americans that is no longer available today due to companies moving jobs overseas. He mentions how the Trump campaign spoke directly to this concern:

> *What Trump was saying, my dad had been saying for, like, since I can remember. Like, we need to bring businesses back.*

In addition to Trump's "America first" rhetoric, Trump's stance on immigration really resonated with Interviewee #10. He was more than willing to share his family's story of coming to America decades ago. As he tells it, it took his dad ten years of "waiting in line" to get out of Cuba—Interviewee #10's grandparents decided that they were going to leave Cuba when his father was four years old, but they did not get to actually do so until he was fourteen. When Interviewee #10 hears about people coming into this country undocumented, he

feels disrespected, thinking that they are skipping the "line" that his father and grandparents waited in for so long:

> *But what I'm very strongly against is illegal immigration, and this is also part of the way that my parents got here. It took my dad 10 years to get into the U.S. … My father's a single child because it would have been harder for my grandparents to leave the island with two kids, than it would have been to leave with one. So, you know, it took him—he was 14 when he left. So, basically around 10 years is what it took him to get out of the island… It's very unfair for people who waited, and who stood in line, and who had to put up with just the same amount of hardships as anyone else—for them to have waited all this time and then for someone to waltz into the border.*

Interviewee #10 is quite proud of his family's journey from Cuba to America. Throughout our conversation, he mentioned the influence that his father had on him growing up. Specifically, Interviewee #10 would talk at length about the values of hard work and determination that he says his father instilled in him. To Interviewee #10, these values of hard work and determination are inextricable from his Cuban heritage. He recalled one conversation he had with his dad when he was fourteen or fifteen:

> *We know what we have to do, we have to work. And that's something that's been passed down to my brothers and I, you know. There was one summer that*

I was making plans of all I'm going to do this summer, and I'm gonna have so much fun or whatever. And my dad looked at me and very coldly he told me, "You're not doing any of that this summer. You're gonna get on the truck with me." And my dad sells vegetables to restaurants. And he told me, "You're going to get in the truck with me and we're going to go out and you're going to learn what it's like ... and that summer was pretty, pretty life changing… [My dad] told me, "You need to learn what it's like to work. You need to see at least a similar version of what I saw when I got here." Because when he got here, my dad couldn't—my dad graduated high school, but he couldn't go to college or anything.

These connections between immigrant backgrounds and the value of hard work were quite common in my interviews. Like Interviewee #10, Interviewee #14 was a political science student who frequently made connections between his political perspective and personal background. A sophomore from the suburbs of northern New Jersey, Interviewee #14 talked at length about his Filipino heritage and the process his parents had to go through in order to come to America in the early 1990s. One of the struggles his parents had to go through was shedding their Filipino culture for American culture. Interviewee #14 perceives this culture-shedding process as tough, but necessary, and he takes issue with immigrants who are hesitant to fully adapt to what he considers is American culture:

My big issue is just this notion that illegal immigrants and immigrants that don't have the proper papers come here to work and live, because I think it does a disservice to my own parents, who've had to go through all of that trial, you know, that trouble to get here to the United States to work. … But because they had to go through the proper way, like, they had to come here, and they had to learn. And they had to adapt to the culture and they had to adapt to American culture, they had to speak English, they had to kind of adapt their own culture to an American culture. … It should not be the other way around, where I'm supposed to learn Spanish for you, because you don't understand English. That's again, you know, it's because you're going here in the United States to better yourself, there's also a trade-off, you need to adapt to the culture. You need to adapt to the language.

Interviewee #14 not only had his parents' experiences to draw on. He also talked at length about the long process his uncle had to go through in order to come to America. He shared that his mother petitioned to get her younger brother into the United States in 2000 before he finally got his visa in 2013. Since marriage forces one to reapply in the immigration process, Interviewee #14's uncle—a man with strong Catholic values—had a child out of wedlock with his then-girlfriend (now wife). Interviewee #14's uncle is now happily married and living in Texas with his family, but that does not mean that Interviewee #14 forgets his uncle's journey:

It was a process and they had to sacrifice for that, and it wasn't easy. And I feel like it's an injustice to people like them if you just allow, you know, people who didn't have to go through that process to come here illegally and to benefit in certain ways that Americans benefit.

What Interviewee #14 ultimately gathers from the immigrant experiences of his family members is the importance of hard work. More than that, Interviewee #14—much like Interviewee #10—projects his family's experiences onto the experiences of other Americans; if his parents were able to work their way up in this country through hard work, then so can others:

I think it's important that I feel grateful because [my parents] worked their way up—it wasn't a mere just stumble in and now you're lucky, and now you have all that you got. Like, no. They had to work their way, and I think the issue with liberals, a lot of times I feel like they underestimate how hard work can actually pay off. You know, a lot of times they're blaming external things, a lot of times they're blaming, you know, the structure of our economy that's not letting for social mobility. I hear that all the time… But I feel like they underestimate like the power of I guess, like, perseverance, hard work, you know, trying to get an education. Again, that's how I view my time here at BC. You know, like, working hard and trying to get the education, because that's what my parents have worked their life, just for them to be in the United States.

And now I'm getting an education here, at a very good school, it's my duty to continue that and to try my best.

Emphasis on the importance of hard work was not unique to solely interviewees who identified strongly with their immigrant background. Nearly all of my interviewees talked about how they see hard work as a core value in their lives. For my white interviewees whose families immigrated to America generations ago, hard work was not associated with their family's journey to America as much as it was associated with their movement up the economic ladder. There were few interviewees who were more securely atop the economic ladder—and self-aware of it—than Interviewee #13.

A freshman psychology student, Interviewee #13 is from a suburb of East Bay, California. She shared that most of the players on her local professional basketball team, the Golden State Warriors, live in her town: growing up, her friend worked at a coffee shop frequented by Warriors superstar Stephen Curry and his wife, celebrity chef Ayesha Curry. Beyond basketball stars, her hometown is mostly filled with people who have successful careers in Silicon Valley—like her father, who used to work at Yahoo and now is with Facebook, where he was one of the first one hundred people to work at the now giant social media platform. Interviewee #13 looks up to her father and praises the work he has put in to provide for his family in the way that he does:

My dad has worked his ass off to get to where he is today. That's the thing I don't think a lot of these silver spoon liberals notice about their parents, because a lot of them are in similar situations, because of this big, like, tech boom, basically. All these people who work in Silicon Valley are not exactly coming from, like, old money or anything. It's kind of like the first generation of really wealthy people in the family. I don't think a lot of these people know how hard their parents worked form them to have the luxurious life that they have, driving their custom [Mercedes Benz] G Wagons and all of that.

Interviewee #13 not only appreciates her father's hard work, but she also sees her appreciation as a quality that separates her from her more left-leaning peers in East Bay. She talked at length about disagreements she would have with fellow affluent, white peers at her "liberal" private high school. In her mind, her peers' views on politics and resource distribution were too strong for people who "never worked a day" in their lives.

For Interviewee #13, her first job came in the summer of 2018. Beyond the fact that she "worked with children," she did not specify where she worked. She claimed that getting her paycheck and seeing how much of her money goes back to the government via taxes really solidified her position against taxation. This argument—that one must work themselves and see their own earnings go to the government via taxation in order to truly understand how taxes work—came up throughout my conversations with Trump supporters on campus. Interviewee #16, a freshman from the suburbs of western Massachusetts, drew from his experience

working at a butcher shop to share with me why he thinks the American government taxes people at an unfair rate:

> *And so when I'm working, I work at a butcher shop. I work part-time. When the state of Massachusetts is taking like $35 out of every paycheck when I'm working hard hours, I'm doing hard physical labor, I'm like: where's Elizabeth Warren? I mean, she wasn't standing next to me doing this work. She wasn't doing the work with me. I work and then she gets to take part of my paycheck and give it to someone who doesn't work and to give it to someone who just has sat and lived on welfare and whose families have done welfare for multiple generations, then, uh, no. Sorry, that's my money.*

To Interviewee #16, taxes are a mechanism for the unfair distribution of resources from those who work hard to those who do not work at all—or, at least, the distribution of resources from those who work hard to those who do not work as hard. Interviewee #13, who also had issues with how her work paychecks were cut by taxes, has a similar viewpoint on taxation as Interviewee #16:

> *I don't think that money that people who work hard to earn should go to benefit people who are too lazy to work. I know that there are a lot of situations that people are in where it is very difficult for them to get work and make money, and then with them it's like, okay, I see where like, welfare comes*

in. But there are a lot of situations where like, people can get jobs and just aren't.

Regardless of their background, my interviewees drew from personal experiences of struggle and hard work to justify the hardships of others. Grievances of undocumented immigrants were considered illegitimate by interviewees who saw them as "cutting the line" that their families so patiently waited in decades ago—reminiscent of the grievances shared by Hochschild's (2016) subjects, whose emphasis on the importance of following the rules was echoed by my interviewees. The struggles of those in poverty or receiving welfare benefits were discounted by interviewees who perceived them as freeloaders—people who do not have quality work ethics and thus depend on handouts from harder workers higher up the economic ladder. In response to the myriad of struggles that other Americans go through in this day and age, interviewees, for the large part, ignored strategies of assisting those in need in favor of rhetoric that insists their struggles are due to a lack of hard work and perseverance.

3. *"Is this redistribution or revenge?"*

Issues regarding identity were constantly discussed in my conversations with the interviewees. One of the common sentiments I gathered was the idea that categories of difference—along lines of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation—were seen as being weaponized, not dismantled. Tatum (2003) offers a useful framework for analyzing identity. She establishes seven categories of "otherness" and associates each category with a form of oppression: race and racism; gender and sexism; socioeconomic status and classism; and more. Within each category, there is a group considered dominant and a group considered subordinate or targeted: for race, whites are dominant and people of color are targeted; for gender, cisgender men are dominant and those who are not cisgender men are targeted; and so on. All of my interviewees identified with at least one, if not many, of the dominant groups outlined by Tatum. From this dominant perspective, interviewees questioned the severity of identity-based oppressions (as laid out by Tatum). Thus, they viewed redistribution in response to those oppressions as unfair—an unjust form of revenge against groups considered dominant.

As a heterosexual, cisgender white man with an upper-class upbringing, I shared many of the same experiences as my interviewees in terms of dealing with identity from the dominant group perspective. These surface-level similarities gave my interviewees a level of comfort to share perspectives that they may not have shared to an interviewer of a different identity—largely due to the fact that their perspectives may be deemed socially unacceptable or politically incorrect. Interviewee #16, a fellow heterosexual, cisgender white man from the suburbs of

Massachusetts, expressed a fair amount of disdain for political correctness and, what he calls, playing the "game of identity politics." From his dominant perspective, Interviewee #16 took issue with how his background influenced how others perceived his opinions, specifically with regards to race:

> *So the way I see it, we look at identity and I go, well, especially when they're talking about immutable character traits, things that I can't control. I cannot control that I'm a cisgender straight white guy, so why am I being judged or why is my opinion being valued more or less than somebody else of different characteristics based on things I can't control? Like that flies right in the face of what Martin Luther King Jr. said, "I have a dream that one day my four kids are gonna be judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin." So like I think that can be retroactively applied to other immutable characteristics that people can't control.*

In his view, there is a redistribution of attention along the lines of race wherein white men like him are being unfairly ignored and judged; he feels that others are discrediting him for something he cannot control. Though Interviewee #16's feelings may be genuine, they are based on questionable assumptions—namely, that there are few, if any, barriers that hinder people of color from enjoying economic and social benefits afforded to white people. I thus asked Interviewee #16 a follow-up question on whether he thinks white men are at a disadvantage today. He began with gender, conceding that white men are doing great on "a lot of

metrics" before pivoting to statistics showing that men are going to college less than women, in an effort to claim that some men are at a "disadvantage." He closed with this statement, weaving in the race component of my question:

> *I'd say white men are still on top, but there's no structure keeping everybody else behind. Everyone else is just busy getting caught up and the evidence would show that they are getting caught up.*

This is the crux of Interviewee #16's argument, as well as the arguments made by countless other interviewees who took issue with identity politics that centered people of color: oppression and inequality certainly existed in the past (as evidenced by Interviewee #16's invocation of Martin Luther King, Jr.; he was not the only interviewee to do so), but they no longer exist today. Claims of racism in the present were deemed illegitimate. From this perspective, prioritization of marginalized voices seems like unfair revenge for issues that were already settled in the Civil Rights Movement. This perspective is certainly controversial, and the interviewees were aware of that. In the words of Interviewee #7, a white freshman who self-identified as upper-middle class:

> *I don't believe white privilege exists, which is hot take. And it probably would get me shot on campus. There would probably be a riot if I said that. But I think privilege comes from the education you have and the amount of money your parents have. Not the color of your skin. And it just happens that white people*

have better education and so ... well, Asians, too. We have more money than Latinos and African Americans on the whole. So, they associate whiteness with success and privilege. But I think it really has to do with your parents and your education.

In addition to race, interviewees took issue with gender identity politics. In the same way that racism was seen as a non-existent issue, interviewees questioned the legitimacy of claims that gender inequality plagues society today. One of those critics was Interviewee #6. As a cisgender woman, Interviewee #6 does not personally relate to those who identify as transgender. From her dominant perspective (though Interviewee #6 is a woman, her identity as a cisgender woman makes her dominant in conversations on transgender politics), Interviewee #6 rejects notions that transgender individuals must be advocated for:

I think that transgender people, like, they're not being discriminated against. I think that everyone is equal under the law and (…) they shouldn't have any special rights. You know, just like women are like right now pushing for extra rights, and like affirmative action, things like that, transgender given the same, and I just don't think it's fair.

Much like Interviewee #16's views on the treatment of people of color in society today, Interviewee #6 rejects claims that transgender people face discrimination despite not identifying with that targeted identity herself. Policies

geared towards representing transgender people are thus perceived as "extra rights" rather than necessary advocacy. Interviewee #6's perspective on gender, like Interviewee #16's perspective on race, is informed by assumptions that many people would disagree with—and she is aware of peoples' objections to her point of view:

> *The position is basically, like: it's like a mental disorder and that we shouldn't have people perform—you shouldn't like perform surgery, you should actually treat it as a mental disorder, which I believe it is. You don't have to agree, but it's just the way I view it. I think that there are two genders. I don't think you can change your gender, like, I think, it's just scientifically impossible. And if I say that to people, they'd call me like a bigot. Even if I say that to like my parents, they're like, "How? You're crazy!" You know, like, I'm really not.*

Along with race and gender, redistribution along class lines was also questioned by my interviewees. Of the sixteen Trump supporters I interviewed for this study, eleven self-identified as either "upper-middle" or "upper" class individuals. Thus, class was yet another aspect identity in which many interviewees identified with the dominant group. Calls for economic redistribution were met with great objection by my interviewees: taxes were seen as an unjust burden, theft of income that was earned through hard work. Lower tax rates were associated with preservation of one's individual freedoms and liberties.

When asked about his upbringing, Interviewee #4 was honest about the upper-class privileges he enjoyed growing up. He mentioned that, although his family frequently moved houses, "every house we've had has been big." His houses always impressed friends and other guests, making it clear to Interviewee #4 at a young age that he was in the upper-class. Interviewee #4 described his hometown as a conservative suburb north of Atlanta. With two conservative parents, Interviewee #4 says he was "raised" as a Republican and solidified his views at the age of 14, when he claims to have started doing "research" on economic issues: "I just like those right policies better than the left."

In many ways, Interviewee #4's perspective on the economy that he says he developed through his own research happens to align with the economic perspective of his parents. On taxes, for example, Interviewee #4's argument against raising taxes mirrors that of his father:

> *I think, for one, if we tax too much, where's the incentive to earn more and work harder, if you're going to lose half of what you earned or 20% or what the heck. … It's just kind of like common sense. Why put in the time to earn a lot if you're just going to earn more and get taxed more as a result of earning more money? So it's just common sense then to not want to work as hard if you're going to lose even more of it… Parents certainly preached that, yeah. Because my dad earned a lot, too, so I kind of grew up around him talking about getting killed by this tax or this tax. So that was certainly a topic that was talked about a lot in my house. So since I grew up around that, I think it kind of formed a thought*

process of, "Okay, he's upset about this tax or this tax, then it's probably not a good thing." So that also helped me lean right, too.

An area vice president of a large medical device company, Interviewee #4's father is a high-earner (as Interviewee #4 mentions). From my conversation with Interviewee #4, it is clear that, in his household, taxes were presented as an unfair burden levied on high-earners like his family—they were "really getting killed with taxes as the upper-class." Interviewee #4 carried this disdain for taxes when he got his first paychecks as a retirement home waiter in high school. Similar to Interviewee #16's objection to getting taxed for his work at a butcher shop in high school, Interviewee #4 talked about how "seeing first-hand" his own paychecks get reduced due to taxes was an impetus for his interest in conservative economic policy.

My interviewees' critiques of redistribution, as outlined in this chapter, are indicative of how cultural backlash is a driving force in their support for President Trump (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Schaffner et al., 2018; Turney et al., 2017). Cultural backlash encompasses the sorts of anxieties that some people may have in the face of changing societal demographics. These sorts of anxieties are similar to the feelings expressed by my interviewees, as they rebuked perspectives that sought to advocate for traditionally targeted identities in fear that those of traditionally dominant identities (like themselves) would be forgotten.

From race to gender to class, interviewees rejected redistribution along identity lines. This redistribution is not purely material. Redistribution can be

understood in terms of platforms, as efforts to center the voices of people of color were perceived as an unfair silencing of the white voice. It can also be understood in terms of representation, as efforts to advocate for transgender people in the legal system were seen as efforts to grant "extra rights" to those who are not cisgender. When identity politics were brought up in our conversations, interviewees focused on the purported plight of dominant groups. In many ways, they saw themselves as victims, too.

4. *"I'm a victim, too"*

For some, it may seem backwards to associate conservatism—an ideology centered on self-reliance—with victimhood. In her study of Tea Partiers in Louisiana, Hochschild (2016) found that her subjects rejected notions of victimhood. She spent time in highly polluted Louisiana communities, decimated by chemical companies like Sasol (formerly Condea Vista) whose wealth rarely trickled down to those of the communities being ravaged. Taking note of how chemical companies were exploiting the people of Louisiana, Hochschild argues that the Tea Partiers she met were "victims without a language of victimhood" (p. 131). They refused to see themselves as victims of unregulated chemical companies: they would rather identify "up" with oil executives than identify "down" with the rest of society (p. 222).

My interviewee population was different from Hochschild's. The middle and upper class suburbs from which my interviewees primarily hailed were far from the dilapidated towns on the coast of Louisiana. As has been established, a large part (if not all) of my interviewee population is privileged and some were acutely aware of that fact. From my perspective, my interviewees were less interested in identifying "up" and aspiring for more than they were in maintaining their current position of comfort. Their personal philosophies of limited government interference and status-quo maintenance are borne out of the respect they have for their parents and those who came before them—the ones who, as they see it, put in the hard work to put them in the privileged positions they are in today.

Bhambra (2017) writes about the narratives of distress used to describe white populations in both the Brexit and Trump campaigns. Her analysis is useful, as it sheds light on how white people may see themselves as victims when their relative positions of advantage are challenged. Though not every one of my interviewees self-identified as white, a majority of them did. In addition, my interviewees were all relatively advantaged in one way or another—all but one interviewee identified as middle-class or higher, and every interviewee is enjoying the benefits of attending a top university like Boston College. Despite these advantages, there were parts of my interviewees' lives in which they saw themselves as victims: from taxes, to foreign competition in the labor market, to affirmative action.

Just as Interviewee #4 saw his family as getting "killed with taxes," Interviewee #2 saw his families like his as targets of national tax policy. Interviewee #2's understanding of the relationship between his family and taxes, though, was not quite the same as Interviewee #4. To Interviewee #4, his family was paying a large amount in taxes simply due to the fact that they are in the upper-class; as Interviewee #4 sees it, those in the upper-class (like his family) pay more in taxes, in general. Interviewee #2, on the other hand, framed his family as unique victims of taxes due to their peculiar class position—yes, Interviewee #2 self-identified as upper-class, but not upper-class enough to dodge taxes:

> *The people who make $10 million or above, their effective tax rate is like 20. What's the federal rate? Like 40 or so? Their tax rates reduce by half because*

they can afford to pay these tax specialists to come in and say, "Oh, put your money here, here and here, and your effective tax rate will be half." Whereas a family like mine might make between like $500,000 and $3,000,000 a year, so you can't afford to pay for this tax specialist, but at the same time you're in the top tax brackets, so you are just getting hit. So people say, like, "Oh, all these upper-class people complain about taxes, even though they're making this much money," but it's like, "Yeah, after-tax income's the same as someone who might make like $150,000 or so." Something like that, I don't know the exact numbers, but that's kind of my thinking.

Interviewee #2's understanding of taxes is common, but misguided. Since the United States follows a marginal tax system, after-tax income will always rise as one's income rises; the idea that the after-tax income of someone making $500,000 is the same as someone making $150,000 is simply untrue. Regardless, this perspective is one that is often adopted by conservatives when expressing their fears of rising tax rates. One does not need to look further than the reaction of the conservative establishment to Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's tax proposal in January. Her proposal of a 70% top federal income tax rate for those earning $10 million or more in income was framed as a general 70% tax rate, as House Minority Whip Steve Scalise warned on Twitter that Ocasio-Cortez was planning to "take away 70% of your income and give it to leftist fantasy programs" (Hiltzik, 2019). Such a framing is far different from the reality of the proposal—which is that the 70% rate would not come into effect until your ten-millionth dollar

earned, and every dollar earned thereafter—yet it still has tremendous influence on young conservatives like Interviewee #2, who see their high-earning families as victims of national tax policy.

Victimhood was not solely found in my upper-class interviewees. Self-identified as middle-class, Interviewee #9 grew up in the suburbs of Massachusetts. As he puts it, his family was "never rich," yet "never struggled economically." He described his parents as frugal individuals who made great sacrifices in order to provide for him and his brother. In talking about his family, Interviewee #9 brought up his father, a software developer who, like Interviewee #9, supports President Trump. His father's support for Trump is not simply the current iteration in his long history of conservatism; in fact, Interviewee #9 mentioned how his father actually voted for President Obama in both the 2008 and 2012 elections. By the end of Obama's second term, though, Interviewee #9's father turned against the former president, critiquing welfare policies and embodying what Interviewee #9 describes as a "classic Republican."

I was interested in Interviewee #9's father's transition from being a two-time Obama voter to a Trump supporter. One thing that was evident throughout my interviews was the importance of parental influence on college-aged Trump supporters—nearly all of my interviewees had at least one parent who had voted for President Trump. Thus, I asked Interviewee #9 to explain to me how he understood his father's transition from Obama supporter to Trump supporter, as it may shed light on the reasons why Interviewee #9 supports President Trump, as well:

Relating to [my dad's] work [as a software developer], I think there might have been one reason why [he supports Trump]. I remember one time, he was talking about like foreign competition in the labor market—of, like, people coming in with work visas and everything. And I remember, when Trump talked about it, [my dad] was like kind of happy about it.

This story is not uncommon. In many ways, Interviewee #9's father's fear of foreign competition in the labor market echoes the "economic displacement" hypothesis that many scholars have considered in their analyses of Trump supporters (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Schaffner et al., 2018; Turney et al., 2017). Beyond this one part of my conversation with Interviewee #9, though, I did not get a sense from my interviewees that economic displacement played an influential role in their support for President Trump. Regardless, his perspective reflected the general perspective of my interviewees in that he saw himself (or, in this case, his father) as a victim—and President Trump as his advocate.

Perhaps the most common area in which my interviewees saw themselves as victims was with affirmative action. With a predominantly white interviewee pool, it was not necessarily surprising that the Trump supporters I talked to were opposed to affirmative action policies. Tatum (2003) writes about the relationship between white identity and affirmative action, arguing that whites who fail to see racism as a system of advantage that benefits white people also tend to be opposed to

affirmative action policies. My interviewees' denial of the persistence of racial inequality and oppression has already been established, and I think Tatum's (2003) perspective is useful in understanding my interviewees' positions on affirmative action.

When it comes to affirmative action, Interviewee #2 spoke in his typical straightforward fashion:

> *I completely disagree with [affirmative action], in my personal opinion, because I just think it should be merit-based only. I guess that's because I didn't get into certain colleges because of it… Like, for me specifically, when I started applying to Ivy League institutions, I was at a disadvantage because of my skin color, because affirmative action. So in that instance I was at a disadvantage.*

As a white person, Interviewee #2 perceives affirmative action in college admissions as a policy of which he is a victim. Tatum (2003) writes about the "concern about white disadvantage" (p. 114) that is at the heart of so many white peoples' criticism of affirmative action policies. Interviewee #2's proclamation that affirmative action puts him at a "disadvantage" echoes this exact concern. Such a perspective reframes affirmative action from a policy that advocates for people of color and other underrepresented groups to a policy that puts white people at a disadvantage.

Interviewee #2 was not the only interviewee who drew on his own college application experience in his criticism of affirmative action. Interviewee #1, a white

freshman from South Boston, mentioned how he refused to explicitly reveal his race in the college application process in fear of the ramifications he thought his whiteness would have on his chances of getting into good schools:

> *Especially with affirmative action while applying to colleges, I didn't put my race down. I think Asians and whites are negatively impacted by [affirmative action]… White privilege and male privilege exist in certain aspects of our society, but it's not as big as the media portrays it to be. You go to Dunkin' Donuts and there's a Muslim woman that takes your order, you say "thank you, have a nice day." Then you go to the library and an Asian man gives you your book. Where's the racism there? It's just people treating people fairly, it doesn't matter what you look like. The media is just portraying it as a plague in American society, and I just don't think that's true.*

At the basis of Interviewee #1's critique of affirmative action is his denial of the power dynamics against which affirmative action policies are designed to fight. By denying the existence of the power dynamics that put white people at an advantage in society today, Interviewee #1 is able to deny the need for affirmative action in the first place. Moreover, this denial makes it easier for Interviewee #1 to frame affirmative action as a policy that unfairly targets white people like him.

The passion with which my interviewees spoke out against affirmative action was a real reflection of their sense of victimhood on the issue. They saw affirmative action not as unfair, but as an injustice—and they were the victims. This passion

was perhaps most strongly exemplified by Interviewee #7. In our conversation, the topic of affirmative action came up as Interviewee #7 was expressing his distaste for Senator Elizabeth Warren and his disagreement with those who are outraged about President Trump's treatment of Senator Warren. To Interviewee #7, Senator Warren is the epitome of why affirmative action is an ineffective policy—he described her as "running around saying she's part of the Cherokee Nation, and benefitting from it," noting the "conservative ire" that comes out in response to stories like Senator Warren's.

Fueled by his firm belief that affirmative action policies are unjust, Interviewee #7's passion increased as he talked more about his views on the subject. He transitioned from critiques of Senator Warren to a personal story about two students from his high school that both applied to Georgia Tech; a white girl and a black boy. To Interviewee #7, this story serves as an example of how affirmative action is a flawed policy:

> *But then they denied a girl who had a 1570 on the SAT. A perfect math score and, what is that, a 70 on reading—the highest in one sitting for our school that year. And she was wait listed, and then denied. She got into Vanderbilt and is now at TC on a full ride. Anyway, that's beside the point. The point being that he was accepted and she was denied. He was probably only accepted—because he didn't have a stellar extracurriculars, like, he was getting, I know what he did, he was a drug dealer at one point. He got in, which, everyone knew why he*

got in. He even knew why he got in. He got in because he was black. There was no reason he should've gotten in.

Interviewee #7 mentioned how, to him, this story serves as proof that affirmative action is "dangerous": not only was a qualified white student not admitted into the university, but a black student whom he deemed unqualified was accepted instead. In telling the story, it was clear that Interviewee #7 identified with the white applicant who was not accepted into Georgia Tech. This identification comes with the fact that Interviewee #7, like my other interviewees, sees affirmative action as a policy that puts all white people at a disadvantage: white critics of affirmative action not only see themselves at a disadvantage at an individual level, but see white people, as a whole, at a disadvantage as well. Due to this, it is unsurprising that Interviewee #7 identified so heavily with the white girl from his high school who was not accepted into Georgia Tech: he sees himself in that white applicant, and all other white college applicants who he believes are fellow victims of unjust affirmative action policies.

Ultimately, victimhood is a touchy subject amongst conservatives. I am sure that if my interviewees were asked to describe themselves, the word "victim" would not be the first word to come out of their mouths. Through my extended conversations with Trump supporters on campus, though, it was clear that feelings of victimhood were shared across the interviewee population. As certain topics of conversation came up, it was evident that my interviewees saw themselves as victims: their families were burdened with high taxes, threatened by foreign

competition in the labor market, and targeted by affirmative action policies. Regardless of the rhetorical denial of victimhood in some conservative circles, I argue that a recognition of feelings of victimhood amongst non-working class Trump supporters is essential if one wants to understand their perspective. This is not to say that these feelings of victimhood are justified—but they are real, and these feelings are at the heart of their support for President Trump.

5. *"We are not alone"*

In doing this project, my goal was not to simply seek out individual Trump supporters on campus and ask them to share their personal opinions on politics; rather, I set out to study Trump supporters at Boston College, as a community. I was hoping to learn about how Boston College Trump supporters talk about politics on campus and the ways in which like-minded conservatives congregate on campuses like Boston College. There is plenty of social science literature that looks into the influence of group dynamics on one's political perspective (Bail et al., 2018; Mutz, 2002; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006): the information and perspectives that one is exposed to presumably affect where one stands, politically. Thus, in my interviews, I sought out to learn how my interviewees coexisted with other students on campus: while some felt more like outcasts than others, it was clear that—despite assumptions of college campuses as liberal echo chambers—my interviewees were not alone on campus in their support of President Trump.

The degree to which my interviewees expressed their support for Trump on campus varied. A self-described "pretty vocal conservative," Interviewee #5 was certainly one of the more outspoken Trump supporters I interviewed for this project. As such, Interviewee #5 has engaged in many conversations with fellow students on campus with regards to politics—in these conversations, Interviewee #5 is unafraid to profess his support for President Trump. Through these conversations, Interviewee #5 claims to have found a certain trend amongst conservatives on Boston College's campus:

I know a lot of people on campus that are like closet conservatives.

This idea of a "closet conservative" rang true with responses I got from my other interviewees regarding conservatism on Boston College's campus: though conservatives on campus may not all be outspoken, they certainly exist—and perhaps in larger numbers than one may expect. As Interviewee #5 shared, the typical response he gets from asking people if they are Republican is one of secrecy: "Yeah, but don't tell anyone."

The reason why "closet conservatism" may be phenomenon on Boston College's campus is clear: to be a conservative is not seen as a socially desirable position, even by conservatives themselves. This issue of social desirability was outlined clearly by Interviewee #1:

The silent majority really does exist. I'm not out here wearing my Make America Great Again hat, because people aren't going to talk to me.

As a follow-up, I asked Interviewee #1 to clarify his statement on the "silent majority" of Trump supporters and whether or not it exists at Boston College. He described President Trump's support on campus as, "Silent. I wouldn't say majority." This description is consistent with what I gathered from my other interviews: though support for President Trump is not shared amongst the majority of students, it is kept under wraps by the significant number of students who do.

Interviewee #1 was not the only interviewee that expressed concern about the social repercussions that would come with his peers knowing about his support for President Trump. Several of my interviewees expressed relief that the interviews would be confidential; one even proclaimed that their answers in the interview would "probably get [them] lynched on campus." One interviewee in particular, Interviewee #14, was rather forthright in expressing his fear of publicizing his support for President Trump:

> *In BC, in general, I am more tempered in my views. I really do hide it. I'll be right out, like, I hide it, 'cause I know. I don't want my personal relationships to be affected, I don't want my track here to be affected either, in negative light and I am genuinely afraid of being misconstrued so that my career here is ruined. I feel like I could see that happening, 'cause it has happened to people here, before.*

Though Interviewee #14's fears were perhaps more extreme than some of the other interviewees, his anxieties about the repercussions that his support for President Trump would have on his personal relationships were widely shared amongst the interviewees. One notable trend I found was that there was a significant level of fear from the female interviewees, in particular, about being socially ostracized due to their support for President Trump. A few of the women I spoke to mentioned how even their close friends and roommates do not know about

their support for President Trump. For Interviewee #6, this refusal to share her politics with her friends is borne out of fear:

> *But then when I came to BC and have really established my views, I didn't tell anyone. Like, my roommates still don't know. I'm afraid to say my opinion because I'd probably be, like, harassed.*

This leaves conservative women on Boston College's campus in quite a predicament: not only are they part of the minority of students on campus who support President Trump, but they are also a minority within that Trump-supporting cohort due to the fact that they are women. As Interviewee #3 says, conservative social networks on campus are, "Demographically, almost always guys."

In my conversations with my female interviewees, I wanted to learn more about what it is like to navigate Boston College's campus as a conservative woman, and the ways in which conservative women on campus do (or do not) connect with one another. When I asked Interviewee #11 if she was able to find a community of like-minded conservatives on campus, her response was negative:

> *Not really. No. That's like part of why I joined the College Republicans was to find that. Unfortunately, we don't meet that often. So it's kind of sad.*

For women like Interviewee #13, difficulty in building social networks of conservative women on campus is expected. As she sees it, women always tend to be more liberal because they are more likely to empathize with liberal social policies. As a result, she argues, "The number of conservative women out there is very slim." With this perspective in mind, Interviewee #13 looks to men on campus when she wants to engage with like-minded individuals. She talked about how fortunate she was to have met men on campus, like her boyfriend, who share her conservative political perspective:

> *But I think that, like, it would definitely be hard if I, like, weren't me and didn't like talking about sports and just kind of naturally gravitate towards having a lot of friends who are guys, I think that it would be very, very difficult. And I think that's something that I've just gotten really lucky with.*

Not all conservative women on campus are as "lucky" as Interviewee #13 in their attempts to meet like-minded friends. Interviewee #15 talked about her difficulties as a conservative woman on campus, and the discomfort she feels at most campus events:

> *I've never felt comfortable going to any of the events that they've held here, whether it's the Woman's Summit or any of that because I felt like it would always be coming from a liberal perspective and even though people might say like, "Oh, like we still want your voice to be heard," and stuff like, "Sure we'll*

listen to your comments," no one was going to support me. So I have been turned off by that on BC's campus.

In response to this discomfort—and her awareness that she is not the only conservative woman on campus who feels like she does—Interviewee #15 is making an effort to formally connect conservative women at Boston College. Her plan is to establish a Network of enlightened Women (NeW) chapter at Boston College. According to Interviewee #15, the goal of NeW is to establish chapters on different college campuses across the country in order to have a "network of women look at political issues, particularly women's issues from a conservative perspective." Interestingly enough, Interviewee #12 also mentioned her plans to be on the board for Boston College's NeW chapter. Schreiber (2008) writes about how conservative women's organizations (such as Concerned Women for America and Independent Women's Forum) have been central to the rise of conservatism amongst women in the United States since the Reagan era. These efforts by Interviewee #15 and Interviewee #12 to establish a Boston College NeW chapter continues in this tradition of conservative women's organizations bringing conservative women together.

Though Trump supporters on campus—especially the women with whom I talked—do feel that a stigma is attached to their political perspective, this does not mean that all Trump supporters are loners on campus. Rather, they have found ways to build networks of like-minded conservatives in response to their shared

feelings of social censorship. It is within these networks that Trump supporters on campus share their ideas and reaffirm their political perspectives.

Attempts to build conservative networks on campus range from the explicit and overt (such as the Republicans Society, or the upcoming NeW chapter) to the discreet and covert (such as private friendships or other personal relationships). One of the more covert ways that Trump supporters connect at Boston College is in the classroom. As Interviewee #10 explains, connections can be built with fellow conservatives with the simple nod of the head:

> *I've met Trump supporters either in BC Republicans or I've met them in classrooms where our professor makes a comment, and it's a small classroom of 12 people or something like that. And you kind of look around the room, and there's someone else looking around the room scratching their head. And when the professor's made a comment two or three times, you kind of approach each other and you're like, "Hey, what do you think, what do you think about Trump?"*

Connections within the classroom are not always covert. As Interviewee #14 explains, conservatives see certain classes on campus as more accepting of their perspectives than others. In these courses, conservatives do not need to keep their mouth shut and find each other after class ends, as Interviewee #10 has experienced—they feel free to join in on the class conversation. For Interviewee #14, he has found comfort in his political science courses, where he feels that there

is more room for debate (and, thus, more room for him to share his conservative perspective without lethal social repercussions):

> *When it comes to Poli Sci class, though, I feel free to express myself because I think—at least in all the classes I've taken so far—there's that mutual respect for ideas and I feel like Poli Sci majors understand the need for debate. I'm lucky that I've encountered that so I've been more open and more expressive about my views.*

Beyond the classroom, another space on campus where conservatives can meet is the church. Many of my interviewees talked about the influence of their Catholic upbringing, and some have continued to be active in the church community at Boston College—Interviewee #14, for example, lectures at campus Mass and is a Eucharistic minister. One interviewee who has been especially successful in building conservative networks through the church community is Interviewee #8. When I asked her about her experiences in finding like-minded individuals on campus, Interviewee #8 immediately brought up her community at the church:

> *I think that coming here I've already found like a really good core group of kids who share the same values as me—who are Catholic and conservative. So, I've been going to church with a group of like five kids—most of them are guys actually and maybe like two of them are girls. And we just go to church and like also we go to some of the same clubs together, like Thomas More society and*

College Republicans and Pro-Life Club. And so I've already found like my group so I feel a lot more eased into it.

For Interviewee #8, this conservative social network is both a pleasure and a surprise. She talked about how her experience in high school at Milton Academy (a college preparatory boarding school just outside of Boston) was far less positive: at Milton, Interviewee #8 felt that the liberal environment left no room for conservative women like herself. At Boston College, she says her experience has been far more positive:

Yeah. I actually really wasn't expecting it. Because when I went to orientation there was a lot of presentations we had to go through and I was like, okay, this is gonna be like just Milton all over again. Like, I'm really gonna get kind of like suppressed in my views just because there's so much sort of new like progressive way of thinking. Obviously it's like a very liberal, intellectual community. ... But what I didn't know is that there were gonna be kids who also were having like the same feelings in these presentations. And that like they were all gonna like come together sort of and like sort of find each other within the first month and see each other in mass every weekend and then start going to all these groups together and, like, I'm just really happy that it happened that way.

As she says later in our conversation, Interviewee #8 has enjoyed life at Boston College because she finally feels like "there are people on [her] side, too" and that things are "not so one-sided anymore." This positive perspective is especially unique given Interviewee #8's identity as a woman and the general consensus amongst my female interviewees that there are certain social struggles that are endured specifically by female conservatives on campus. It is worth noting that Interviewee #8 does mention how, in her church community, "most of them are guys." Similar to Interviewee #13, Interviewee #8 has had more success finding like-minded conservative men on campus than conservative women.

Perhaps the most extreme case of conservative networking I found amongst my interviewees was with Interviewee #4 and Interviewee #7. When I talked with Interviewee #4, he mentioned how his floor (a freshman residential building) is heavily comprised of Trump supporters:

> *I've certainly met a lot of other kids who lean right with me, too… Our floor is 42 total people, and I would say I've probably talked to about 25 of them, or around that, that I know for a fact are fans of Trump.*

I was shocked by Interviewee #4's estimation. Sure, I was aware that there are plenty of conservatives on Boston College's campus—that is part of the reason why I chose to do this project—but 25 out of 42 students in the hall sounded like quite a large ratio. Due to my skepticism, I initially wrote off Interviewee #4's claim as an exaggeration. Then, in my conversation with Interviewee #7, he shared that he

is living with Interviewee #4. I took this opportunity to ask Interviewee #7 if he could corroborate Interviewee #4's claims about their hall being especially conservative, and he did:

> *I was surprised. I was expecting to be one of the few [Trump supporters], being from Georgia, and everyone's from the northeast. And I was like walking in and I'm like, "All right. Here we go. I'll be the only conservative." And then most of the people in my hall are conservative. I was like, "Wow. How did I get this lucky?" But I think, honestly, across the board, and at orientation, in my room, five out of six guys were conservative. I think, at least in the male population of the school, there's a lot more conservatives than people would expect.*

Though Interviewee #4 and Interviewee #7's situation may be an outlier, it serves as an example of how conservatives at Boston College—especially conservative men—do not always have to look far to find like-minded individuals on campus. Whether they are in class, at church, or in their dorm rooms, conservatives at Boston College are not alone. Regardless of the stigmatization they may feel from their more liberal peers, conservatives at Boston College are likely to find other individuals who feel targeted in the same way and connect due to their shared experiences as conservatives on campus.

By forming these conservative networks, I argue that my interviewees and other Trump supporters at Boston College become more emboldened in their opposition to mainstream liberal discourse on campus. Much has been written on

the positive effects of intergroup contact between opposing political groups, both in terms of its ability to decrease political polarization (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and increase the likelihood of deliberation and political compromise (Mutz, 2002). These beneficial aspects of intergroup contact do not represent what I found in my interviews: my interviewees largely spoke of liberal campus discourse with disdain, not with appreciation for differing perspectives. From Interviewee #7's anger with the "intolerance" of his purportedly anti-Trump "Courage to Know" seminar to Interviewee #16's description of the Lynch School of Education as a "leftist indoctrination camp," my interviewees did not speak fondly of non-conservative influences on campus.

One thing to consider is whether or not my interviewees would be more receptive to non-conservative points of view without the reaffirmation they get through their conservative networks. Interviewee #7, for example, may have been more willing to consider the perspectives in his "Courage to Know" class if he did not go home afterwards to a hall full of conservatives who would agree with (and effectively legitimize) his reservations with the course. Recent research shows that modern-day conservatives are rarely receptive to liberal points of view: in their experiment assigning study participants a Twitter bot of opposing political ideology for one month, Bail et al. (2018) found that Republicans became substantially more conservative after one month of exposure to a liberal Twitter bot, while Democrats exhibited non-statistically significant increases in liberal attitudes after one month of exposure to a conservative Twitter bot. This echoes what I found in my interviews, as the Trump supporters I talked to never recalled moments when

liberal influences on campus shifted their own political perspectives to the left. In fact, the sentiment I gathered was that these liberal influences only further solidified my interviewees' positions as conservatives.

It is insufficient to study Trump supporters on Boston College's campus without considering the group dynamics outlined in this chapter. It is necessary to identify the kinds of discreet and non-discreet conservative networks that exist on campus if one wants to develop a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of Trump-supporting students. Though some may assume that the kinds of people I interviewed may be outliers or outcasts on a liberal college campus—that is certainly not the case. Trump supporters may not dictate the terms of campus social life or find themselves at the center of campus discourse, but their presence at Boston College is undeniable.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive understanding of the rise of President Trump requires an analysis of Trump supporters that goes beyond tropes of the white working-class. As has been established, there has been undue focus on the working-class identity of President Trump's supporters given that Trump's supporters are, by many measures, a relatively privileged group of people (Walley, 2017; Manza & Crowley, 2017; Bhambra, 2017). My project addresses this issue by focusing on Trump supporters at Boston College, and my findings indicate that President Trump appeals to non-working class individuals in a variety of ways.

President Trump's economic appeal to my interviewees is fairly straightforward. Especially for my upper and upper-middle class interviewees, the idea of supporting a politician who pushes for low taxes and deregulation is seemingly in their self-interest. The theoretical framework of rational choice theory (Abell, 2000) explains this thought process: for those who are good economic standing, support for President Trump can seem like the rational choice to make.

In addition to economics, President Trump appeals to my interviewees in terms of values. Interviewees talked at length about the importance of hard work in their lives and the ways in which their families were able to overcome struggle through working hard. For my interviewees, President Trump is perceived as an advocate for hard-workers like themselves, while liberals are seen as advocates for freeloaders and lazy dependents. This framing of the liberal perspective as an affront to hard work echoes the attitudes of the Louisiana Tea Partiers profiled by Hochschild (2016).

Lastly, President Trump appeals to my interviewees' perspectives on issues concerning identity. Tatum's (2003) theoretical framework for analyzing identity—and the distinctions she makes between dominant and targeted identities—is especially helpful in understanding this aspect of President Trump's appeal. Interviewees expressed significant disdain for policies that explicitly advocate for targeted identities. A prime example of this kind of policy is affirmative action, which was perceived by the interviewees as unfair policy that puts white people at a disadvantage. Many of my white interviewees, in particular, framed themselves as victims in conversations on affirmative action, and narratives of victimization were common throughout my interviews. These feelings of victimization fueled their support for President Trump, who is seen as someone who shares their disdain for policies like affirmative action and fights for those of dominant identities.

President Trump's appeal to my interviewees is significant given the sizeable presence of Trump supporters on Boston College's campus. Through my interviews, I learned about networks of conservatives on campus that I was never before aware of. These networks are formed in class, at church, and in clubs—and they are perhaps larger than many would expect. Due to this presence of Trump supporters on campus, I have recommendations for future research on this population.

It would be interesting to see what would result from a project focused solely on conservative women at Boston College. From my interviews, I got a sense that conservative women on campus have a far different experience than conservative men with regards to connecting with like-minded peers. A project that sets out to understand the experience of conservative women on campus, specifically, would be

beneficial towards understanding this gendered phenomenon. Such a project could engage with questions regarding the kinds of issues that are emphasized by conservative women, as well as the kinds of networks that conservative women draw on.

In a similar fashion, second-generation immigrant conservatives would be an intriguing population to hone in on for future research. In my interviews, I found that those with parents who had immigrated to the United States were especially passionate about values of hard work and playing by the rules. I think that a study focused solely on this population of conservatives would be useful in understanding why they are so passionate about these values.

Finally, it would be useful to conduct a similar study to my own that includes upperclassmen in the interviewee pool. Given that all of my interviewees were underclassmen, it was difficult to gauge the influence of campus life at Boston College on the political perspectives on my interviewees. The freshmen, for example, had only been on campus for a couple of months before our conversation and were still adjusting to campus life. A study that includes upperclassmen participants would be able to more effectively answer the question of whether or not college campuses are politically polarizing environments.

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